

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 3125

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GT

SUBJECT: IMPASSE OVER SELECTION OF NEW PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS

SUMMARY: PR DEPUTY-ELECT GONZALO YURRITA TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS JUNE 6 THAT PRESIDENT-ELECT LAUGERUD HAS BECOME PERSONALLY INVOLVED IN ATTEMPTING TO BREAK IMPASSE OVER SELECTION OF NEW CONGRESSIONAL PRESIDENT. LAUGERUD, WITH SUPPORT OF ARMY COMMAND, REPORTEDLY HAS VETOED MLN CANDIDATE IN ATTEMPT TO PREVENT CONTINUED CONTROL OVER CONGRESS BY MARIO SANDOVAL, MLN LEADER AND VICE PRESIDENT-ELECT. NEITHER MLN NOR PID CANDIDATE HAS ENOUGH VOTES IN NEW CONGRESS TO WIN PRESIDENCY OF BODY. LAUGERUD HAS REPORTEDLY CALLED FOR COALITION BLOCK MEETING JUNE 8 IN ORDER TO INFORM NEW DEPUTIES OF HIS CHOICE FOR POSITION. COALITION COULD REACH COMPROMISE AGREEMENT WITH LAUGERUD OR MLN DEPUTIES-ELECT COULD REBEL, RESULTING IN CONTINUED IMPASSED. CONFLICT DEMONSTRATES POOR RELATIONS BETWEEN LAUGERUD AND SADOVAL AND INSTABILITY OF POLITICAL COALITION BACKING NEW GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. GONZALO YURRITA CUESTA, REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (PR) DEPUTY-ELECT, DESCRIBED TO US ON JUNE 6 THE IMPASSE WHICH HAS DEVELOPED OVER SELECTION OF PRESIDENT FOR NEW CONGRESS, WHICH WILL BE INAUGURATED JUNE 15. AFTER WEEKS OF NEGOTIATIONS AMONG ALL PARTY BLOCKS, CONFIDENTIAL

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NONE OF THE NEW DEPUTIES HAS BEEN ABLE TO WIN THE

SUPPORT OF A MAJORITY OF HIS COLLEAGUES. YURRITA SAID HE AND OTHER NEW PR DEPUTIES-ELECT HAD MET THAT MORNING WITH PRESIDENT-ELECT LAUGERUD TO DISCUSS PROBLEM. ACCORDING TO YURRITA, LAUGERUD TOLD THEM HE HAD FLATLY REJECTED THE MLN CANDIDATE FOR THE POSITION, HECTOR ARAGON, AS WELL AS THE PID CANDIDATE, DONALDO ALVAREZ. THE PRESIDENT-ELECT REPORTEDLY STATED THAT HE HAD CALLED THE ENTIRE NEW COALITION CONGRESSIONAL BLOCK TO A MEETING JUNE 8 AT WHICH HE PLANNED TO INFORM THE NEW DEPUTIES WHOM HE WANTED TO BE CONGRESS' PRESIDENT. CURRENT SPECULATION IS THAT LUIS ALFONSO LOPEZ (ALSO REPORTEDLY ARANA'S CHOICE) OR RAFAEL CASTILLO VALDEZ (FORMER GUATEMALAN AMBASSADOR TO UN) ARE LAUGERUD'S FAVORITES FOR JOB. MLN LEADER MARIO SANDOVAL, CURRENTLY THE PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS, REPORTEDLY SUGGESTED TO LAUGERUD THAT THE COALITION BLOCK VOTE TO SELECT HIS SUCCESSOR, BUT LAUGERUD REJECTED THE IDEA, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT SANDOVAL HAD WON ALLEGIANCE OF ENOUGH RENEGADE PID MEMBERS TO ASSURE ARAGON'S VICTORY WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT COALITION BLOCK. YURRITA WAS VAGUE RE ROLE PR WOULD PLAY, BUT IMPLIED IT MIGHT ASSIST LAUGERUD IN BREAKING IMPASSE.

2. YURRITA STATED THAT LAUGERUD, WITH SUPPORT OF ARMY COMMAND, HAD OPPOSED ARAGON NOMINATION IN EFFORT TO PREVENT CONTINUED CONTROL OVER CONGRESS BY SANDOVAL. ACCORDING TO YURRITA, LAUGERUD HAD REJECTED ALVAREZ AS SIMPLY INCAPABLE OF HANDLING THE JOB. YURRITA SPECULATED THAT SANDOVAL MIGHT ACCEPT LAUGERUD'S CHOICE FOR THE CONGRESS' PRESIDENCY IN RETURN FOR MLN CONTROL OVER THE VICE-PRESIDENCY OF CONGRESS PLUS SOME KEY MINISTRIES SUCH AS INTERIOR. IF SANDOVAL REFUSED TO CONCEDE THE ARAGON CANDIDACY, YURRITA PREDICTED THAT THE NEW CONGRESS COULD OPEN WITH LONG, ACRIMONIOUS SESSION IN WHICH SEVERAL VOTES MIGHT BE NECESSARY BEFORE PRESIDENT SELECTED.

3. COMMENT: THE SELECTION OF A NEW PRESIDENT OF CONGRESS
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IS ONLY ONE OF WHAT UNDOUBTEDLY WILL BE MANY CONFLICTS BETWEEN LAUGERUD AND SANDOVAL. THE BITTER STRUGGLE OVER THIS ISSUE HAS DEMONSTRATED TO ALL POLITICAL OBSERVERS THE INSTABILITY OF THE COALITION BACKING THE NEW GOVERNMENT. REGARDLESS OF WHO WINS THE CONGRESSIONAL PRESIDENCY THIS YEAR, NEITHER LAUGERUD NOR SANDOVAL IS LIKELY TO ACCEPT THIS CONTEST AS THE LAST BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF CONGRESS. END COMMENT.

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